

《論 文》

Educational Policy During the Age of Socioeconomic Divide in South Korea:

Problems in the Educational Policy for Fixing Inequality in the Educational Opportunities of Social Minorities

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キーワード

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Since the Asian Currency Crisis, the spread of the socioeconomic divide in Korean society has been considered a serious social problem. At the same time, the increase in population of social minorities as a result of the socioeconomic divide is also considered to be a social problem. Due to the socioeconomic situation, the role of an educational policy for social minorities intensified significantly. Since the wages of South Korean workers are determined by their level of education, the cause of the socioeconomic divide is deeply related to the inequality inherent in educational opportunities. After exploring current educational problems, such as the expansion of the educational divide, this paper will discuss the problem of educational divide with respect to the prompted content and to difficulties in educational policy.

Firstly, the problem of educational policy in the age of socioeconomic divide will be explained concretely.

Secondly, the content of educational policy—with the goal of fixing the inequality of educational opportunities of social minorities—will be introduced, after an explanation of the educational issues surrounding social minorities.

Thirdly, current problems in educational policy will be analyzed, including the difficulties faced by each subset of social minorities when participating in learning activities. After that, the problems with those policies that try to overcome these difficulties will be discussed.

Finally, this paper will suggest that the lack of learning opportunities available to social minorities is the main problem with the current educational policy, and this must be overcome if South Korea wishes to strive for continued socioeconomic development.

1 . Introduction

Since the Asian Currency Crisis in 1998, the socioeconomic divide has escalated year after year, and is now considered a national problem. In particular, as Koreans have seen an increasing economic divide between the haves and have-nots, an inequality in the educational opportunities of these two groups has occurred. While the haves obtain such opportunities because they can afford to invest in their education, the have-nots do not because they cannot. Therefore, the educational divide created by the socioeconomic divide has been

discussed as a serious problem in society (Ha 2005, pp.167-173). This problem is indicated by the representative think tanks of South Korea, such as KEDI, SERI and KRIVET. These think tanks have determined through analysis that the types of educational divide fall into two categories. One is the expansion of the educational divide in the region, which is caused by an income divide; the other is the expansion of the scholastic ability divide.

Firstly, since the income divide expanded after the Asian Currency Crisis, the inequality of educational opportunities intensified to become the most significant problem of the region's society. Recently, the region of South Korea was divided into two areas: where wealthy people live and where poor people live (Choi, p.375). As previously stated, we should understand the situation of South Korea as such. Most students and parents in South Korea fight desperately to enter universities, because attending a prestigious university is a very significant factor in terms of success in Korean society. However, the problem is that the rate of admission at universities in each disparate region is very different. The rate of admission to universities in large cities such as Seoul and Busan increases yearly. On the other hand, the rate of admission in rural areas is relatively low. That is to say, the difference in rates of admission between rural areas and urban areas is swayed by the income divide, which is distributed by region and which determines the cost of educational investments by region. For instance, parents who live in urban areas earn high incomes and can invest in the education of their children. However, as most parents who live in rural areas do not have enough income already, they cannot invest in sending their sons or daughters to prestigious

universities (Choi, pp.379-380). Consequently, since the income divide has expanded in recent times, the inequality of educational opportunities has been considered a serious problem.

Next there is the divide in the scholastic ability of Korean citizen in terms of social class. This belongs to the category of lowering in students' scholarship of poverty class, lowering in defectors of North Korea and foreign labors' scholarship. Then, this divide incurred the inequality of educational opportunity at lifelong education. In the first place, the decrease in poor students' scholarship is influenced by the insufficiency of their parents' educational support, because poor parents work so hard to earn their income. The KEDI survey analyzed low-income families and found that they cannot sufficiently invest in the education of their children, while families that have a high income invest a lot of their earnings in education (Kang, p.179).

Secondly, it is a problem that social minorities, such as defectors from North Korea and foreign laborers, do not have enough learning opportunities. Previously, the only necessary education was in literacy and vocational training, which allowed these people to adapt to Korean society. However, at present, although the number of people in this minority is rapidly increasing, educational policies that would include establishments by law do not support learning or ensure public educational opportunities (Ryu, pp.8-9).

Furthermore, there has been an expansion of inequality in opportunities for lifelong education. Today, the main type of education for adults is promoted not by the public sector but by the private sector. Accordingly, money is a necessary factor when adults learn what they want to study. In this situation, since the

economic divide between the haves and the have-nots is wide, it is considered a natural fact that poor people cannot get educational opportunities. That is to say, as the economic divide yields an educational divide, so educational support for adult have-nots who want to learn is now being demanded (Ryu, p.22).

As mentioned above, studies about the educational divide in South Korea indicate that this problem is influenced by the economic divide. It is also true that the expansion of the educational divide is a serious problem in educational policy. After exploring present educational problems, such as the expansion of the educational divide, this paper will discuss the educational divide with respect to the policy of lifelong education. The role of lifelong education for social minorities such as poor people, defectors of North Korea, and foreign laborers will be made apparent in the next section.

2. The rising of problem of educational policies in the age of socioeconomic divide¹⁾

Since the Asian Currency Crisis, the socioeconomic divide in South Korea has escalated by promoting the structural reform of political and economic parties (Yo, p.47). Since this divide is considered a serious social problem, the term “socioeconomic divide” was defined by researchers as detailed below.

The term “socioeconomic divide” includes the particulars that brought this aspect of social change to South Korea. Since the economic structure has recently been altered to accommodate the pivot factors of knowledge, technology, and service, an income divide appeared between people who work in

departments that include those factors and people who do not. As a result, as the income divide in Korean society has spread, that income divide was influenced by the inequality of educational opportunities (Hong, pp.9-11). That is to say, the term “socioeconomic divide” defines social phenomena such as the expansion of the income divide by social class, the increasing number of poor people, and the growth in inequality of educational opportunities (Min, p.19). In particular, the growth in inequality of educational opportunities has intensified to become one of the problems of socioeconomic divide that is deeply related to income divide by social class (Kang, p.4).

Recently, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in South Korea also recognized the growth in inequality of educational opportunities as a problem of policy. Actually, MEST says it like this: “We should notice that as a policy for social minorities, financial support with respect to positive discrimination has to be discussed. Meanwhile, the educational environment should be improved in the regions where social minorities reside” (Hong, p.10). The reason that MEST focused on the policy for social minorities is explained by Hong.

Hong discovered, as MEST suggests, that providing educational opportunities to social minorities makes it possible for them to realize the mobility of social class, since they can get high-income jobs through higher education. However, it is difficult for social minorities to obtain higher academic careers in South Korea because they cannot pay the money that universities demand for school fees. Therefore, Hong insists that MEST should promote educational policies without the need for compensation, such as free vocational training, free long-distance

education for social minorities, and the expansion of a scholarship system for social minorities in higher education (Hong, p.11).

Judging from the above, the most significant issue of MEST is the problem of the inequality of educational opportunities these days. Of course, MEST and educational researchers agree about the fact that educational policy should be focused on social minorities, as they do not have enough educational opportunities (Yoon, pp.218-220). However, MEST has still not suggested a concrete policy for solving that problem.

Therefore: firstly, this paper will discuss the educational problems that each group of social minorities is facing now. Secondly, it will show what kinds of policies are currently being promoted for them. Thirdly, it will discuss what difficulties exists in promoting a policy for social minorities at present, in terms of the deficiency of budget and legislation.

3. The shift in the rise of social minorities

If the socioeconomic divide is considered to be a social problem as well as a problem related to educational policy, it is implied that the number of social minorities is also rapidly increasing. Since that they are noticed as existence to be spread by the socioeconomic divide the increase of people to be called “social minorities”, the increase of their number will be forecasted after that. Therefore, the shift in the rise of social minorities in the age of socioeconomic divide will be seen as showing concrete data.

Firstly, since the educational divide in South Korea has been influenced by the income divide since the Asian Currency Crisis, the shift in the income divide of each social class will be explained in order to convey the increase in social minority groups of a lower income. Based on the KDI survey (Table 1), the average income of the middle class has shown a slight increase since the Asian Currency Crisis. On the other hand, the average income of social minority groups such as workers, farmers, disabled people, foreign laborers, and defectors of North Korea has remained at a steady level since 2000 (KDI, p.202).

As the analysis of KDI shows, the reason that the income divide between the middle class and the social minority gets larger is due to the change in wage system. The standard wage in the labor market was altered in 1998 in order to take a serious view of knowledge-based work and not evaluate based on seniority. Therefore, the wage level in the case of social minorities who do not have working knowledge was decreased (KDI, p.202). In consequence, the reason that social minorities have a lower income is that the educational divide of the social classes is influenced by wages.

Secondly, the shift in the rise of foreign laborers and defectors of North Korea is rapidly increasing among the group of social minorities. The number of defectors of North Korea shows a steep rise (Table 2).

As the number of defectors of North Korea increases, there are problems with how they

Table 1. The shift in average monthly income by social class (1996 – 2006, KRW)

| | 1996 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Middle class | 2,700,000 | 2,300,000 | 2,480,000 | 2,750,000 | 2,810,000 | 3,050,000 |
| Minority groups | 1,190,000 | 1,050,000 | 1,190,000 | 1,180,000 | 1,190,000 | 1,180,000 |

(KDI: *Ten years since Economic Crisis* 2008, p.268)

can adapt to capitalism and the free market of South Korean society. On the other hand, today, the number of foreign laborers is experiencing a slight rise (Table 3).

The reason for the rising number of foreign laborers is that they have opportunities for vocational training and income in Korean society. However, the wage level of foreign laborers and defectors of North Korea is still lower than for Korean citizens because they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills, nor enough educational opportunities. This is another reason for the companies of Korea to use them as cheap labor power.

Consequently, the social minorities in the age of socioeconomic divide are continually increasing, and they have numerous problems, such as lower income and inequality of educational opportunities.

4. The educational issues of social minorities and the content of promoted policy

4.1. The educational issues of social minorities

As the number of social minorities increase, the role of education as the means to fix the educational divide is now being noticed. What follows below will show the educational issues surrounding each group of social minorities and will then explain the content of educational policies meant to overcome the educational

divide.

According to MEST and KEDI, the social minority that has the greatest educational divide problem is the group of people who do not have educational opportunities, who want to learn but who would not have enough basic knowledge or abilities to live in Korean society even if they had opportunities. In fact, MEST and KEDI sympathize with the fact that educational support for them is needed in order to help them adjust to the social changes of Korean society and to increase their income. However, not all groups of social minorities have common educational problems; each one has different educational issues (Ryu, p.37). The different educational themes of each group can be explained as follows.

The first item is the educational issues for poor classes such as people with low incomes and unemployed people. Vocational training seems to be the most significant learning issue in the poor classes because they want to increase their income.

The second item is the deficiency in educational opportunity of people who live in farming and fishing villages. As there are not enough educational facilities or teachers in those regions, they are left with a situation in which they do not learn what they want to learn.

The third item is the problem of educational support for disabled people. In their case, the kind of educational content needed for their education must be discussed after considering

Table 2. The shift in the rise of defectors of North Korea (1999 – 2006, people)

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Number | 148 | 312 | 583 | 1,139 | 1,281 | 1,894 | 1,387 | 2,019 |

(The Ministry of Unification, <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/>)

Table 3. The shift in the rise of foreign laborers (1999 – 2005, people)

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Number | 168,950 | 210,249 | 229,648 | 252,457 | 437,954 | 468,875 | 485,144 | 2,019 |

(Korea National Statistical Office, <http://www.kosis.kr>)

their condition.

The fourth item is the educational issues of foreign laborers and defectors of North Korea. As mentioned in the above section, their number is gradually increasing. However, since educational support is needed in order to realize economic independence in Korean society, issues such as vocational training and literacy education are considered to be the problems with educational policy (Ryu, p.40).

Based on the above statements, it is clear that there are different educational issues for each group of social minorities. If so, the problem is that the main point of educational policies these days is how those policies can satisfy the educational desires of each group of social minorities. To demonstrate this point, the content of educational policies for social minorities will be explained in the next section.

4.2. The content of educational policies for social minorities

Keeping in mind the ongoing expansion of the educational divide, the content of educational policy for social minorities proceeds as follows. Today's main policy is focused on vocational training. The policy of vocational training as analyzed by MEST consists of three aspects of vocational training: for the poor classes, for defectors of North Korea, and for foreign laborers.

Firstly, the educational policy for people who have lower incomes is focused on the vocational training program. The particular point of this program is not that the government should make a concrete program, but that the government should invest in support for educational programs led by the companies for whom these people are working. Also, this

program is based on the law called, "the improvement of the educational support system in working environments."

So why is the government of South Korea promoting vocational training as a policy for people of lower income? The reason why the government places the responsibility of their education onto individual enterprises has two sides. One is that the government can curtail expenditures of the education budget by leaving education in the hands of employers. The other is that, since people who have lower incomes participate in programs provided by companies, they can learn the skills that those companies want their employees to acquire. MEST expects that they can strive in the workplace to acquire the new skills needed to increase their income, and that curtailment of educational finances has been realized.

However, a survey of learners who are participating in vocational training recently indicated that the policy that is focused on vocational training appears to be having a particular result. This survey shows that people who earn higher incomes actively participate in vocational training, more so than people who earn lower incomes (Table 4). To find the reason why people with higher incomes learn more actively, the survey analyzed the rate of their learning activity and found that people with lower incomes do not have a strong motivation for learning. In other words, there still exists a difference in the degree of participation in educational activities between people with lower incomes and higher incomes, even though this policy for people with lower incomes has been promoted.

Secondly, there is a problem in the educational policy for defectors of North Korea that is rapidly increasing. Defectors of North Korea face the problem that they must

Table 4. The rate of participation in learning activities by amount of income (KRW: Monthly)

| Content Income level | Vocational Training | Liberal Education | Volunteering | Sports | Total |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------|------------|
| Over 3,000,000 | 53.2% | 29.5% | 1.4% | 28.6% | 100 (220) |
| 2,000,000-2,990,000 | 40.1% | 38.6% | 1.0% | 29.2% | 100 (202) |
| 1,000,000-1,990,000 | 46.6% | 38.8% | 1.1% | 20.8% | 100 (178) |
| Under 1,000,000 | 56.9% | 21.6% | 0.0% | 23.5% | 100 (51) |

(KEDI, *The survey of level of lifelong education*, 2006, p.11)

adapt to Korean society, because they have previously lived in a different political and social environment. Hanawon was founded as an educational institution for them through the cooperation of MEST and MU (the Ministry of Unification) with the purpose of social adaptation. The educational curriculum of Hanawon consisted of political education, social adaptation to Korean society, vocational training, and literacy education, in a program of study taken over a period of three months. Among these courses, vocational training was considered the most significant in their educational policy. The reason why vocational training is important for them is that they need to make a living that will last for their whole lives, even though they get a settlement subsidy from the government. Hanawon also provided courses such as computer skills, English, driver's license training, and literacy education. Consequently, vocational training for defectors of North Korea is focused on education for the purpose of social adaptation.

Thirdly, the education of foreign laborers has recently been categorized as an education policy for social minorities. Most foreign laborers come to South Korea with the purpose of working, learning, and earning in the workplace. In other words, vocational training is the most significant factor in the earning of an income and the acquiring of skills, since they do so in the workplace through labor. Therefore, MEST promotes vocational training for them through the OJT

program for small companies in the manufacturing industry. Today, however, there have been some troubles, such as a delay in or denial of paying wages, even though a lot of foreign laborers come to Korea with the dream that they can earn money and develop skills (Hynkoreh, 2008). Accordingly, the government is now recognizing the fact that it is a problem to leave these people's education in companies' hands.

Judging from the above, the particulars of educational policy for social minorities, such as people of lower income, defectors of North Korea, and foreign laborers, is focused on vocational training. However, the educational divide is still not only a serious social problem but also the main cause for the expansion of the socioeconomic divide, even though the government is promoting a policy for them. In other words, it means that the present policy for social minorities has problems that must be solved. For that reason, the next section will discuss what kinds of problems exist within the present educational policy.

5 . Problems with educational policy in the age of socioeconomic divide

The educational policy for social minorities in the age of socioeconomic divide, as stated above, has been promoted to fix the educational divide. However, although the education program has been focused on vocational training for people of lower

incomes, defectors of North Korea, and foreign laborers, the reality of the present educational policy is that their learning activities do not yield enough results. This section will be devoted to discussing the kinds of problems that exist in such a policy.

Firstly, the educational divide is still spreading in this age of socioeconomic divide; therefore, there is a lack of funding for the education of social minorities. As a concrete example: the educational budget for social minorities in South Korea forms 1 percent of the total educational budget. On the other hand, the average budget of OECD states that social minorities occupy a population density of over 20 per cent. In addition, some researchers of lifelong education insisted that the deficiency in the budget for the education of social minorities is perpetuated in order to deprive them of educational opportunities (Ryu, p.173). The amount of money paid for education by learners from each social class is demonstrated in the following data.

In analyzing the above data, it is apparent that free learning activities for people of lower incomes appear to be successful because 62.1% of learners participate in such learning activities. However, if we consider the fact that learning activities sponsored by administrative institutions do not exist in the case of people with lower incomes, we

discover that free learning activities are supported by volunteer organizations such as NGO or groups from the civil movement. This point demonstrates the fact that educational policies for people who have lower incomes depend on the spontaneous learning support activities of civil groups because of the lack of a government-funded educational budget. That is to say, the problem of educational policy for lower-income social minorities is caused by the deficiency in a budget for lifelong education. Learners whose monthly wage is under 1,000,000 won do not have the opportunity of learning through public services.

Secondly, foreign laborers are excluded from educational opportunities as well, since the problem of their education is left to companies. In the situation that they cannot afford to provide learning opportunities even to Korean citizens of lower incomes, what the government provides in educational expenditure for foreign laborers is in reality implausible. Therefore, the government had no choice but to leave their education in the hands of minor companies.

As was shown in the above table, educational support by companies themselves is only focused on employees with higher incomes. The reason that people with higher incomes have more educational opportunities than foreign laborers is that employers recognize

Table 5. Payment for lifelong learning activities by each social class (monthly-income-based)

| Social class (by income, KRW) | Free learning activities | Employers' support for employees | Families' support and learners' payment | Administrative institutions' support | The support of labor unions | Loans for learners | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 2,000,000 - 2,990,000 | 39.5% | 30.9% | 23.5% | 4.9% | 1.2% | 0.0% | 100 |
| 1,000,000 - 1,990,000 | 45.8% | 20.5% | 18.1% | 8.4% | 4.8% | 2.4% | 100 |
| Under 1,000,000 | 62.1% | 3.4% | 27.6% | 0.0% | 6.9% | 0.0% | 100 |

(KEDI, *The survey of level of lifelong education*, 2006, p.141)

that employees with higher incomes contribute more to the profit of the company. In other words, from their point of view, educating higher-income employees is more effective than educating foreign laborers. Consequently, the problem with foreign laborers is that they are always excluded from opportunities to learn. This situation is fixed as a part of Korean social structure. Accordingly, the method to overcome this problem demands the provision of learning opportunities via the cooperation of public service organizations and the civil movement.

Thirdly, the problem of educational policy for defectors of North Korea is the deficiency in understanding about strangers such as them. Most of South Korea understands the fact that defectors of North Korea have lived in a different culture, political environment, and economic structure. Most of them also know that defectors of North Korea completed their education in Hanawon in order to adapt to Korean society. Nevertheless, the problem is that when Korean citizens are faced with the possibility of working or living with defectors of North Korea, they begin to think that defectors' abilities and thoughts are very different from their own. Therefore, the issue of educational policy for defectors of North Korea can be seen as not only promoting their social adaptation, but also ensuring that Korean citizens accept them as equal citizens without discrimination.

If the problems in educational policy for social minorities in the age of socioeconomic divide are summarized as stated above, those problems can also be explained as follows. With regard to the circumstances surrounding social minorities, the lack of educational funding for social minorities can be highlighted as an essential problem. Due to the deficiency of the

education budget, the policy was changed so that the government leaves the guarantee of educational opportunities for social minorities to private organizations such as small companies, civil movement groups, and cultural centers for lifelong learning.

As the result, social minorities are faced with an educational environment that cannot provide high-quality free educational opportunities through public service. In other words, this appears to be the only method by which to obtain high-quality educational opportunities in South Korea.

However, education provided by private sectors has problems in the case of social minorities. Since learning provided by private sectors is not a free educational business, learners must pay money to be educated. Consequently, educational opportunities in private sectors are mainly provided for people in the middle class, because social minorities cannot afford to pay the cost of learning.

If we consider this present situation, we can see that the educational divide in South Korea is spread via factors of educational policy, such as the deficiency in an education budget, educational services dependent on private sectors, and the lack of concern for social minorities' education.

6 . Conclusion

Since the Asian Currency Crisis, the spread of the socioeconomic divide in Korean society has been noted as a serious social problem. At the same time, the increase in the number of social minorities is also considered a major social problem. From a socioeconomic point of view, the role of educational policies for social minorities has intensified significantly; since the pay rate in South Korea is decided by

one's education or academic career, the cause of the socioeconomic divide is deeply related to the inequality of educational opportunities.

In order to solve this problem, the government promoted a policy for social minorities. The main policy was focused on vocational training, with the premise that their economic independence is the most significant factor in their ability to live in and adapt to Korean society. However, the government left the execution of their education to companies or private sectors, because the budget for promoting educational policies was lacking. Consequently, their educational opportunities were not provided by public sectors such as the government, but were rather provided by private sectors. This shows the fact that even though social minorities wish to have the opportunity of vocational training, prompting learning is impossible if they can not pay the cost for learning. The essential question is how such an educational policy solves the inequality of educational opportunities in the age of socioeconomic divide. The answer is that there are deficiencies in policies, budget, and understanding of social minorities.

These days, as the socioeconomic divide in Korean society has expanded, the educational divide has spread. In particular, the inequality of educational opportunities for social minorities is indicated as a serious problem of educational policy. Nevertheless, the real situation in South Korea is that the government does not have a policy for fixing the inequality of educational opportunities for social minorities. Providing learning opportunities for social minorities is an essential problem that should be overcome in order for South Korea to continue to strive for socioeconomic development. Therefore, diverse policies of vocational training and the instatement of a budget for them should be explored from now on.

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- 1) Prior studies related to educational divide can be divided into two factors. The first one is, as Ha indicates, that educational divide between regions at the age of decentralization has now spread (Ha, pp.167-173). Based on the research of Kim & Bang, the second factor is that the educational divide is

shown by the rate of admission into institutions of higher education. Their study indicates that parents' academic careers influence whether or not their children earn a higher education (Kim & Bang, pp.119-151). These previous studies focused on analyzing the actual situation of educational divide from the points of view of family, society, and region. In other words, no studies have ever tried to discuss the inequality of educational opportunities of social minorities in the age of socioeconomic divide. Therefore, this paper will explore of the problem of educational policy for social minorities.